



# WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

110 Main Street, P.O. Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473  
(978) 874-5569

E-mail: [WestminsterHistory@Verizon.net](mailto:WestminsterHistory@Verizon.net); facebook: Westminster Historical Society; website: [Westminsterhistory.org](http://Westminsterhistory.org)

September 2012

## GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA

So many exciting things happened in 1912! One of them was the founding of the Girl Scouts of America. Westminster's first Girl Scout troop was formed eleven years later, in 1923, according to the 1961 History of Westminster. It was led by Captain Barbara Fenno, Lieutenant Harriet Smith, Lieutenant Doris Gilson, and 2nd Lieutenant Helen Dawley, all outstanding women in our town. The class photos during these early years show several girls wearing their uniforms.

The organization found new life in 1943 when Doris Butterfield established a Brownie troop for the younger girls and became its troop leader. She also formed the town's first troop committee made up of these dedicated women: Mildred Cossaboom, Mabel Fenno, Annabel Dawley and Nellie Raymond. Emelie Cummings came on board as the troop's assistant leader, and Scouting in Westminster was underway!

As the girls grew each year, the scouting organization grew with them, with additional levels of Girl Scouting. By 1950 every school grade level was included through Senior Scouts in grade 12. By the late 1950s, there were 200 Scouts with sixteen leaders and twenty-one troop committee members. These decades of Scouting in Westminster were successful due to the faithful and dedicated involvement of hundreds of troop leaders and committee members, many of whom served for decades in the Scouting program, as their own daughters grew and flourished as Girl Scouts, in time becoming leaders themselves.



*An early Westminster Girl Scout troop on a field trip to the Whitney Homestead in South Westminster.*



*How many Girl Scouts in uniform can you count in this old school photo?*

There were hundreds of women who made Scouting a vital part of life in Westminster through the years, so the list would be long indeed to recognize everyone.

However, it would be fair to say that Irene Kamila embodied the spirit of Scouting and carried on its work for the longest time. In addition to being a Scout leader in town she was on the Board of Directors of the area Scout Council and was a trainer to hundreds of Scout

*(Continued on page 4)*

**2011-2012  
OFFICERS, BOARD MEMBERS**

<i>President</i> .....	James Biglow
<i>President-Elect</i> .....	Janice Swenor
<i>Vice President</i> .....	
<i>Clerk</i> .....	Joan Longcope
<i>Treasurer</i> .....	Linda Landry
<i>At Large</i> .....	Roni Beal
<i>At Large</i> .....	Carole Christensen
<i>At Large</i> .....	Melody Gallant
<i>At Large</i> .....	Betsy Hannula
<i>At Large</i> .....	Ann Honkonen
<i>At Large</i> .....	Darlene Johnson
<i>At Large</i> .....	Tom Marien
<i>At Large</i> .....	Mike Volmar

**STAFF**

<i>Administrative Assistant</i> . . . .	Liz Maillet
<i>Assistant Treasurer</i> .....	Michelle Valentino
<i>Curator</i> .....	Betsy Hannula
<i>Genealogy Researcher</i> .....	Darlene Johnson
<i>Historian</i> .....	Patricia Lasky
<i>House Director</i> .....	Ken Marien
<i>Housekeeper</i> .....	Christy Lombardo
<i>Newsletter Editor</i> .....	Patricia Gendron
<i>Registrar</i> .....	Joan Longcope

**MEETINGS**

Meetings are held September through June on the 3rd Tuesday at 7 pm at the House, and are free and open to the public.

**HOUSE & GIFT SHOP HOURS**

The Historical Society House is open Mondays 7-9 pm and Fridays 9-12 Noon. and other times by appointment.

**MISSION**

The Westminster Historical Society's mission is to save and share Westminster's past.



**LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Dear Members,

The end of summer is approaching. Soon the kids will be back in school, the days will getting noticeably shorter, and the weather will start to cool off. There are several upcoming events, some traditional, some new.

The Flea market on Saturday, September 22 is one of the classic activities at the Historical Society. It has always been one of our major fund-raising activities, and is typically well-attended. We need all of the volunteer help we can recruit to help set up, run the market and clean up after. If you can volunteer some time call the Society at 978-874-5569 or send an e-mail to [westminsterhistory@verizon.net](mailto:westminsterhistory@verizon.net).

Eight days later on September 30 is the Paint the Town Exhibit & Auction. Come to the American Legion Hall at 127 Main Street to view and bid on works of art by local artists. This event was very popular when it was last held.

On Sunday, October 14, plan to attend the 100th birthday celebration of the Upton Building. There will be activities for all ages as well as a presentation of the history of Westminster's oldest school building.

With these as well as programs planned for the rest of the year the Society depends on volunteers to make the events a success. People are needed to work both up front and behind the scenes in preparation and execution. You may be receiving a call from the Society in the next weeks asking you to donate some time to help ensure their success. As members, you have already shown your financial support of WHS. We hope you will also show your support through the donation of time. Thanks in advance.

Jim Biglow  
President

**WISH LIST**

- Lawnmover—gaspowered
- Snowblower
- LCD monitor

## CURATOR'S CORNER

We are grateful to the following people who donated items to the collections to be preserved.

**Eunice Arcangeli:** two books

**Betsy Hannula:** WWII Army uniforms from Lempi & Wilho Aalto

**Joyce Hannula:** 2 milk cans & chicken feeder from Tuomi farm

**Aileen Hecht:** photo of Eli Kahkola in Army uniform

**Flea Market:** book, Pictorial History of Our War with Spain

**Jeanne Keena:** 3 Oakmont yearbooks & 1968 USGS map of Westminster

**Bill Lakso:** book Billy Explores His World

**Mary Ella Leiter:** Nurse's uniform from HHMH School of Nursing

**Beverly Lothrop:** Depot school desk

**William Miller:** DVD of Upton School photos of 1915 graduating class

**William Miller:** Guy Miller's World War I ditty bag

**Claire Dube:** Ed Dube's Army and Police uniforms

**Kathy Nickens:** DVD of genealogy of Samuel Taylor

**Sue Oskochil:** business card for Westminster Garage

**Christine Trainque:** article on Hertel family & General Nelson Miles information

**Peter Williams:** Oakmont sweatshirt with chipmunk mascot logo owned by Gail Walker

## UPTON SCHOOL UPDATE

The Board of Directors and Capital Campaign Committee members are taking persons interested in learning about the plans for the Upton School through the building in order to better visualize what will be taking place. If you would like a personal tour, please call the Society at 978-874-5569 and ask for Liz.

We're also continuing our project to list all the persons who were students in the Upton School from 1912 to 2000. We will be planning get-togethers of people by classes who attended school in Westminster. We do need help. If you can give an hour or two each week, please email us at [WestminsterHistory@Verizon.net](mailto:WestminsterHistory@Verizon.net) or call Betsy Hannula at 978-874-0430.

Fundraising is beginning! We will be contacting you this next year. We believe we are making an investment in our town by preserving a beautiful building in a beautiful setting and for a noble purpose – sharing Westminster's past with people today and preserving it for future generations. Please think about what you can do to help us!

## UPTON BIRTHDAY PARTY

We're celebrating! On Sunday October 14 the Historical Society will be hosting a birthday party for the Upton School which opened in 1912. A big tent will be set up on the lawn next to the Upton School. An exhibit of items from school life in Westminster will make you smile or grimace. Which will you do? Then look for yourself among all the class photos taken at the school - all grades – every year. We will also have a Powerpoint presentation of the Historical Society's plans for the building running continuously so you can learn more about the renovation project to come.

Refreshments will be fun – cupcakes and fresh popcorn, cold cider and hot coffee. If you're interested in seeing the inside of the Upton School, you may also take a tour with us. The winners of the Scarecrow Contest will also be announced at 4 pm. Join us! If you can help us with this event, please call Liz.



*The Upton School all alone on Academy Hill in 1912.*

*(Continued from page 1)*

leaders, holding her membership well into her 80s. She was also well known for dressing up as Juliette Low, the founder of Girl Scouting, and then impersonating her at Scout functions.



*Irene Kamila dressed as Juliette Low*

Westminster Scouts went on to establish traditional activities, many of which continue to this day: the Boy and Girl Scout Christmas Tree lighting at town hall; Mother-Daughter and Father-Daughter parties and dances; celebrating Girl Scout Sunday in March, cookouts at the end of the year, and Fly Up ceremonies acknowledging the accomplishments of girls as they prepared for the next level of Scouting.

Camp Collier in Gardner started offering camp programs for girls and outdoor living and education became an important aspect of Scouting. Hundreds of our town's girls took part in the summer programs at the Wampanoag Girl Scout Day Camp and overnight camps at Laurel Wood and Green Erie.

On a national level, Westminster Girl Scouts attended the Girl Scout Roundups. Later the Wider Opportunity program, now referred to as the Destinations Program, was introduced, providing the chance for girls to expand their horizons through trips that promised adventure and education. Several Westminster scouts, both affiliated and non-troop affiliated, took part in these exciting trips which helped open the eyes and minds of small town girls by broadening their horizons.

Money was raised for Girl Scout activities from a variety of sources. The girls paid a minimal amount

in dues. In the early years the Girl Scouts raised funds by preparing and presenting an annual play or minstrel show every spring and held food sales. And of course, they participated in the annual Girl Scout cookie sales, which was a highly visible – and tasty – form of fundraising.

In the early years Westminster Scout troops were not affiliated with the national organization. In 1962, Westminster voted to join the Montachusett Council of Girl Scouts (CGS), which encompassed all the towns north of Worcester, bringing together the scouting community onto the national scouting stage. In 2006 the Westminster troops joined with Ashburnham, Ashby, Townsend, Fitchburg, and Lunenburg to form the John Fitch Girl Scout Council. In 2008 Westminster was included in the new Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts, although the Girl Scout Service Center remained in Worcester.



*Every March, to celebrate Juliette Low's birthday, a Scout's Own is held, where all current and past Girl Scouts are invited to join in a promise circle. This one was held in the Elementary School parking lot.*

Today, the scouting tradition in Westminster remains strong, with the granddaughters and great grand daughters of our original pioneers leading troops of their own and passing along the tradition of scouting in Westminster to their own daughters. In 2007 there were about 100 girls in six troops in Westminster. They included one Daisy troop, three Brownie troops, one Junior and one Senior troop. Westminster has truly become part of the vision Juliette Low had dreamed of so long ago.



*We're continuing our reporting on Westminster's connections to the Civil War during these years of commemoration. Thank you to Mark Landry for doing the research for this article.*

## **JAMES HERVEY MILLER - CIVIL WAR SOLDIER**

James Hervey Miller may not be famous outside of Westminster for his exploits during the Civil War, but he was one of the few men who took the time to record his diary and then publish his story. Of the tens of thousands of men who survived our deadliest war of all times, comparatively few diaries or letters have survived, and one is James Hervey Miller's. Entitled "My War Experiences," it covers two and a half years at camp, on the battlefield and in the hospital.

James was born February 11, 1832 in Westminster to Jonas and Susan (Bond) Miller in the house at 142 Main Street. Later his family lived at 93 West Princeton Road. He was the older brother of Edward P., Cyrus K., and Charles A. Miller. He was a mechanic and a farmer at the time of the enlistment and was also married and a father. His wife was Mary Harrington, whom he married in 1854. He had four children, Freddie H. born in 1855, Frank E. in 1856, Willie H. in 1860 and Alfred G. in 1862.

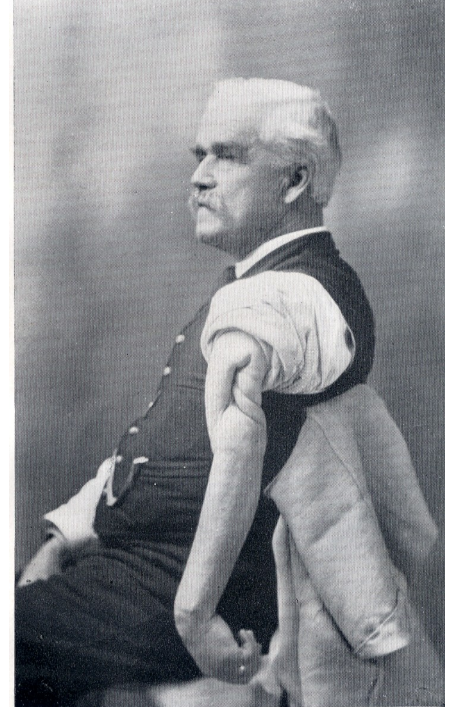
On August 9, 1862 he enlisted into the service in the Joseph Forbush house in Westminster at the age of 30 for 3 years as part of the



*James Hervey Miller served in the Union Army from Aug. 27, 1862 to Nov. 7, 1864*

quota for Westminster. He was mustered into the service as a private of the United States Army August 27, 1862.

He became a sergeant of Company H, 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, and was in the battles of Campbells Station, Fredericksburg, Vicksburg, Jackson, Blue Springs, siege of Knoxville, Wilderness, Spottsylvania, North Anna River, and Cold Harbor. He was seriously wounded in Cold Harbor on June 3, 1864, receiving a rifle ball from an enemy sharpshooter in his upper arm. The surgeons removed 8 inches of bone between his elbow and shoulder, and the wound did not heal for a year because of



*This photo shows a more elderly J H Miller with the wound he suffered at Cold Harbor.*

gangrene. One of the most interesting pages in his memoirs is the photo of him with his arm bared to show the large scar and the story of how the doctors found a pint of maggots in his wound eating the rotten flesh. Almost a year later the wound had not healed and he discovered a piece of the bullet still inside and when removed he finally began to heal. After a furlough to recover, he was discharged on November 7, 1864.

After the war, a company of infantry of 64 members, mostly veterans of the war, was organized in the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia and given the name Wachusett Rifle Company. James Hervey Miller was commissioned here as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, along with other Westminster men, Ethan W. Holden as Captain, and later Ethan W. Holden, Edward P. Miller and Edward S. Kendall. This company was deemed one of the best in the Commonwealth by the

*(Continued on page 6)*

## LOOKING FOR SCHOOL PHOTOS

Do you still have your children's school photos at home? Our goal is to have a photo of every class for every year. Our entire collection goes back to the Westminster Academy days, the old Central School at the foot of Academy Hill, the Upton School, the Loughlin School and the rest of the Westminster Elementary School that was torn down in 2000.

Since the Upton School was used for so many years, most children occupied it at one time or another, even if just to go to Music classes with Mr. Brough or to watch a movie

in the movie room. If you have your school photo at home, please consider donating it to the Society or lend it to us so we can make a copy. Our goal is to get every class from 1912 to 2000 documented.



*The last class to graduate from Westminster High School*

*(Continued from page 5)*

### J. Hervey Miller

Adjutant General and was disbanded when the State Militia was reduced in 1876.

Unfortunately his wife Mary died March 11, 1865. In 1866 he married Lizzie D. Rice. Together they had more children, Cyrus T. born in 1867, George H. in 1868, Eddie R. in 1871 and Harry W. in 1873.

James Hervey became one of the most active citizens in Westminster. He served the town for twenty years as an Assessor, Selectman and held several other notable positions including an enumerator of the federal census. He was honored in 1887 as the Chief Marshal of the Sesqui-Centennial Parade celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first house in Westminster in 1737. He was a member of the Grand Army of the Republic Post 69, and commander of this post for several years and chaplain in 1881.

## HENRY DAVID THOREAU CAME TO TOWN

It was as if Henry D. Thoreau had really come to town. He sure looked like him. He talked like him. He knew every detail of his life and details of all his famous acquaintances. It *had* to be him. But it wasn't. It was probably one of the most convincing interpretations of a famous person we've ever seen. Richard Smith engaged the 30+ people gathered in the bandstand (to guard against the hot sun and then the few sprinkles that followed) in conversation about his life and the times – the 1850s.

In the hour and a half conversation Thoreau told us about his transcendental philosophies and amused everyone with his belief that one should work as little as possible to support himself.

The most surprising revelation was his idea about voting. He said, "I do not believe in voting. It is almost like any other game of chance." He explained that all the politicians in the 1850s were for slavery and his family was abolitionists. This program was sponsored by the Freedoms Way National Heritage Area, the Westminster Cultural Council with funding provided by the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the Westminster Historical Society.



*Richard Smith portrayed Henry David Thoreau on the bandstand on Sat. July 28, 2012.*

## MEMBERSHIP

If you're not yet a member, please consider joining today. It's easy. Just fill out the form below and send it along with your check to the Historical Society. Your membership support is essential to us.

Thank you if you have already renewed their membership this past year. If you are unsure of your status, just call Liz at the office (978-874-5569). You will want to be a member in order to take advantage of the ten percent discount on all items in the Gift Shop! If you are 75 years of age, your membership is free!

### WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
 e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Individual	\$25
Family	40
Senior (over 65)	15
Contributing	50
Friend	100
Honorary (over 75)	0

All members receive a 10% discount in the Gift Shop.

Please contact me about volunteering. These are some of my interests:

- Sorting, cleaning, and cataloging items.
- Putting data about items into a computer database.
- Helping with newsletters and brochures.

Please send form to Westminster Historical Society, Membership Committee, P.O. Box 177, Westminster, MA 01473.

## DATE OF ANNUAL MEETING SET

The 92nd annual meeting of the Westminster Historical Society will be held on Saturday, October 20 at the Old Mill. Registration will begin at 5:30 pm followed by dinner at 6:00 pm. To attend, please send the reservation form from this newsletter along with your check (each meal is \$30.00) to the Historical Society.

We will have a treat for the evening program! Joyce Hinkley, an ALFA instructor at Fitchburg State University, will talk about the impact of industry in Westminster in the early 1800s. Save the date!

## FLEA MARKET

Don't forget the annual Flea Market on Saturday, September 22nd. It is our biggest fundraiser to help pay operating costs at the Historical Society. If you have items to donate please leave them in covered boxes in the barn (we stack them). If you have furniture it would be best for us if you brought it down the night before the Flea Market because storage of large items is difficult.



We need volunteers at the Flea Market to help in the weeks before. Please give Liz Maillet a call at the Historical Society, 978/874-5569.

We can always provide you with a receipt for your donations so you can deduct their value as a donation to a non-profit on your income taxes. Thank you for your support!

### IN MEMORIAM

Clif Coulter  
 John Howard  
 Anne Lockhart  
 Mary Vedoe  
 Toivo Wilen



## ANNUAL MEETING INVITATION

You are cordially invited to attend  
the 92nd Annual Meeting of the  
Westminster Historical Society  
on Saturday, Oct. 20th at the  
Old Mill Restaurant

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Business Meeting and  
Installation of Board Members

7:15 Program by Joyce Hinkley,  
an ALFA instructor at Fitchburg State University,  
on the impact of industry in Westminster in the early 1800s.

### HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING RESERVATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ place/s at the Historical Society Annual Meeting on Sat. Oct. 20 at the Old Mill in Westminster. Buffet meal is \$30 per person (includes tax & gratuities).





## GARDEN CLUB NEWS

It was a cloudy morning on July 14, but no one who participated in the local garden tour complained. This was one of the few mornings this summer without the bright sun blazing down on our sun scorched lawns.

The tour began at Roni Beal's condo at the Meadows and moved onto Emily D'Onfro's home near the James River dam. Despite the lack of rain, all the garden spaces looked beautiful. Refreshments were served outside at the D'Onfro's homestead. Fourteen people turned out for the tour.

The last stop was at the home of Ralph and Ellie Carey on Wyman Pond. The Carey's have a pretty bed of flowers growing near the water, along with some very happy chickens. We all piled onto the Carey's pontoon boat for a leisurely tour around Wyman Pond. By the end of the boat tour, the skies cleared and sun was out. Everyone had a nice time.



*Emily's Garden (above)  
Beth in the garden (below)*

We need a few interested people to help us catalog our collections. If you have 2 or 3 hours a week to help out, please call us!



## WESTMINSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY GIFT SHOP

When looking for a unique gift for birthdays, anniversaries, and other holidays or special occasions, be sure to browse the WHS Gift Shop. Whether shopping for yourself or someone on your gift list, you are sure to find the perfect gift here. The Gift Shop is open on Mondays from 7-9 pm and Fridays from 9 until noon and other times by appointment. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases.

### Books

<u>Cemetery Inscriptions</u> . . . . .	25.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , 1832 by Hudson . . . . .	5.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , 1893 by Heywood. . . . .	96.00
<u>History of Westminster 2008</u> by WHS . . . . .	95.00
<u>History of Westminster</u> , by Tolman . . . . .	20.00
<u>Homestead Heritage of Westminster</u> , by WHS . . . . .	25.00
<u>Images of America</u> , by WHS . . . . .	19.99
<u>Olin Warner, Sculptor</u> , by Hyson . . . . .	4.50
<u>200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Westminster</u> , . . . . .	5.00
<u>Wajusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (hardcover). . . . .	30.00
<u>Wajusett Gatherings</u> , by Sinclair (softcover) . . . . .	20.00

### Tapestries

Cotton afghan in green, navy, burgundy . . . . .	45.00
Tapestry wall hanging . . . . .	35.00

### Other

<i>New Wachusett Mountain</i> charcoal drawing . . . . .	60.00
Calligraphy sampler . . . . .	12.00
Cross stitch sampler Kit "Mosman" . . . . .	36.00
<i>Cracker Factory</i> print. . . . .	45.00
framed pen & ink of <i>WHS house</i> by Santora . . . . .	28.00
Map of Westminster 1855. . . . .	6.00
Notepaper Westminster scenes, pkg.12 . . . . .	3.50
<i>Downtown Westminster 1831</i> by Peckham . . . . .	30.00
Postcards . . . . .	3/1.00
Children's books . . . . .	7.95
Paper dolls, Assorted . . . . .	5.00
Tobacco Shed pottery . . . . .	priced as marked
Tote Bags . . . . .	priced as marked

Westminster Historical Society  
110 Main St., P.O. Box 177  
Westminster, MA 01473

NON-PROFIT  
US Postage Paid  
Westminster,  
MA  
01473  
Permit 10

### **DATES TO REMEMBER**

**Sat., Sept. —WHS Flea Market**

**Sat., Oct. 14- Upton Birthday Party**

**Sat., Oct. 20—Annual Meeting and  
Dinner & Program**

## **NEW OWNER FOR THE SUMMER HOUSE**

The Historical Society's summer house, located behind the Historical Society house, was auctioned off on Saturday, August 11, at Skinner, Inc. in Marlboro. The summer house has a new owner and it will be moved to its new home very soon. The new owner and location remain a mystery right now.

Steve Fletcher, Skinner's auctioneer, informed everyone attending that there was a great deal of interest in the summer house. Because of all the interest, there was a bidding war, and the final bid was a phone bid for \$47,500. We were overjoyed with such a high bid, because this money will go directly into the Upton Building Renovation Fund.

The summer house is a treasure and we will miss not having this unique building in the back yard. Our consolation is that the money raised from the sale will help restore the Upton building which is another treasure in Westminster.



*Above and below: Skinner, Inc. sign and interior of the building with items for auction.*

